

## **Build a Great Web Site and Come Up First on Google:**

The Smartest Thing You'll Ever Do for Your Business, Reputation, and Income

### **Part 2**

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*Our society, our culture, has immutably and irrevocably joined the Internet revolution. The vast majority of my present clients and certainly all of my future clients do and will "Google"—it's so ubiquitous and powerful it's become a verb—to find a product, service, or piece of information as surely as the sun rises. As a craftsperson (and, hopefully, at the same time raising your skill level in the craft of operating a small business) you certainly can deny or resist this reality, but I believe that will make you an anachronism: a relic from a different age. And not in a good way...*

*On the other hand, if you choose to embrace the moment, and explore the possibilities of the Web as one of the best, most personal, most honest and transparent advertising, branding, and marketing tools that exist, it will pay off in ways both financial and personal that can be literally beyond your dreams, beyond what you can see for yourself.*

—from Part 1, in the January 2009 *Journal*.

Here's a quick review:

- Your Web site must offer a strong picture of who you are, what you do, and how you operate. Ideally it will serve the same purpose as personal word-of-mouth marketing.
- "We're not selling piano service, or pianos; we're selling trust."
- The person seeking your services will absolutely be influenced by first perceptions, and you will be judged by the ranking, appearance and quality of your Web site.
- The key is making it personal—making it feel like you.
- People judge us by what we, our vehicle, our tools and our Web site look like.
- A great Web site, properly optimized and ranked in the search engines, will allow you to be one of the technicians, or the technician, in your community that people describe as the best, "the one to get."
- As in piano service, you get what you pay for in Web site design and content help. Do not make your decision based on price—make it on proven results, high quality, and a trusting, collegial feeling.

- Ask for and get help. Hire three different professionals to help you: a Web site designer, a writer or editor to produce or help you produce the content, and a search engine optimizer, or site marketer. This is a long-term, hopefully lifetime relationship.
- Have a very clear idea of what you want. Make a detailed outline of all the areas and sub-areas you want on your site.
- Don't be afraid to be creative and authentic. Photos are essential.
- If your spouse and/or your best friends get excited about the site, you're good.
- Identify and dissolve your personal barriers to marketing yourself.
- If done right, and optimized right, the site will pay for itself many times over.
- Properly done, marketing equals success and a recession-proof business—it makes YOU a trusted brand, like Google, Amazon, or the PTG.

For decades the main marketing medium for piano technicians, beyond word of mouth—the principal hook we dragged in the public water to fish for clients—was the Yellow Pages. This is a static resource—one message, one time—and is usually just a listing, because even a small display ad in the Yellow Pages was enormously expensive for a sole proprietor like me and most of my colleagues.

And what did that hook, meagerly baited, drag in?

Price shoppers. People who don't care about quality—they care about price and price alone, which means you are just one of a handful or a page of tuners who get a call. The kind of clients you want to "fire," to move away from, very early on in your career if you possibly can. With one or two exceptions, I've never found price shoppers to be quality, long-term clients. For most of us, the Yellow Pages did one part of its job, which was to legitimize us, give us the perception of "weight" and success by having our business names in print. There's something in the old-brain, dominance-and-status-recognizing part of us that automatically is impressed by words in print or other shows of success and power. The other part of the Yellow Page ad's job—providing qualified clients—was mostly an abysmal failure.

We all instinctively know, deep in our wiring, that personal referral, pleasing a client to a high degree and being referred by that happy client to others, is the golden road to success. There is no more effective form of building trust before the appointment occurs. When you walk in the door of a properly personally-referred client, many layers of caution, mistrust, and questioning are already removed, and your chances of becoming the doctor, the guru, the highly skilled professional piano artisan who "orders work" on the piano are greatly enhanced.

Trust equals speed; when you are trusted, you can quickly assess the situation, make the diagnosis, and book the work. Trust is the real, true, lasting business asset we have. Personal referral is the gift that trust bestows.

My Web site now operates almost as effectively as personal referral.

I'll give you a very recent example, one of two dozen or so since I opened the site. A couple with three young children moved here last year, bringing with them a completely restored Steinway & Sons B that had new everything—board, block, keyframe and keyset, action parts—the "full Cleveland," as we say, done by a rather famous commercial restorer in New York City, a big shop that rebuilds over 100 instruments a year.

The couple Googled "Steinway Los Angeles" and my site came up on the first ranking page. They sent me an e-mail, raved about the site, said it really allowed them to get a sense of who I was, and a relationship ensued. I was engaged to tune the piano and "tweak" it since it had been in storage for a year; I explained that the work could be anything from two hours to 12 hours, depending on the quality of the restoration and the degree to which the piano had been prepared previously. Because they already had developed an initial strong trust via the Web site, they were fine with that.

I got there and met the couple: nice, smart, funny. The dad was thrilled with the sound of the instrument. So was I; the new board was just singing and very resonant. The problem was the action: very, very stiff. The three children, were about to start taking lessons and this action would have de-inspired rather than inspired them. The balance weight (BW) was 44.5 grams throughout the tenor and treble, with the bass at between 48.5 g and 53 g.

The classical parameters for balance weight in grand pianos are generally recognized to be idealized between 36 g and 39 g. A BW higher than that is logarithmically stiffer and more resistant as the number climbs. After some fairly precise field evaluation with the Stanwood jigs and a digital scale, we determined that a key ratio change was in order. We proposed to move the key capstans about 1.6 mm closer to the player and tilt them at a 7-degree angle, and we figured that would bring the BW down to 38.5 g. I got on the phone with the player, answered his questions, and he agreed to the work. Boom. Just like that. Why? He told me: "Because I got a great feeling from your Web site, and my wife got the same feeling from you; plus, you obviously know what you're doing."

I got a check for \$4420.00 for the shop work plus a complete 12-hour service in the home. Here's part of an email my office manager got from the player's wife:

*David (my David) has been playing the piano every day since David (your David) fixed it up. I can't tell you how happy it's made him, and how appreciative I am.*

*Thanks,*

*Abbi*

In addition, they will be my loyal clients, meaning tuning two or three times a year, with another two hours of voicing and tweaking (the client plays every day, as do the kids now), so that Google search they did returned \$4500 immediately—less than the cost of originally constructing the site—and between \$4,000-5,000 over the next five or six years. Now that's an effective ad.

If you had an electronic billboard on the main drag into your city, people would think you had a lot of money and a powerfully successful business. You could daily, or weekly, or monthly, or hourly if you wanted, change the content on the billboard to suit either your market or your personal taste. As piano technicians, we don't need anything that flashy or obvious. But seeing a professionally-done Web site, with pictures, videos, and a creative and personal message, including words of sincere praise from real clients, sends the same message to the brain and being of the observer: these people are serious, solid, and capable. These people dominate their field. They're the ones to ask for help. This, my friends, is the magic formula for being the gatekeeper of all things piano in your town—perception is reality.

Now, I'm assuming that you as a craftsperson have your ducks in a row and can consistently provide complete and top-notch piano service, or can direct your precious clients to colleagues of yours who are qualified and will pay you a fair fee for the referral or, better yet, will subcontract to you so you can be the "general contractor" and keep the client. I'm also assuming that you tell the truth and are a good person.

Now we're going to discuss how to get and keep your wonderful, personal, original site on the first page of Google. This is done through a process called *search engine optimization*. A working definition: Search engine optimization (SEO, also search optimization) is the process of editing and organizing the content on a Web page or across a Web site to increase its potential relevance to specific keywords on specific search engines (like Google) and insuring that external links to the site are correctly titled and in abundance. This is done with the aim of achieving a higher organic search listing and thus increasing the volume of traffic from search engines. In other words, when done correctly, it will move your site up in the page rankings, and if you can do permanent maintenance optimization, for a monthly fee, you will move to the first page of all the search engines: Google, Yahoo, Ask.com, and others.

There are search engine optimizers, professionals who do this work, all over the country. I highly recommend you contact the person who helped me move my site to the top of the rankings; she is smart, committed, successful, has been in the business since the Internet began, and loves to work with small businesses. If she can't help you, she'll find someone that will. Her name is Marcela De Vivo; her Web site is [seomind.com](http://seomind.com), and her contact number is 818-482-7562.

You can see for yourself what she did for me: type "pianos Los Angeles" into a search engine. Now try "piano technician L.A.," or "rebuilding pianos California." You'll see that little old David Andersen Pianos, our teeny 3-person business, is on the first page, usually in the first three or four listings.

What do you think a potential client's reaction is when he sees you listed on the first page of Google? What happens in that old, old section of the brain that deals with social status, power

and dominance? That part of the brain says, "Ooohh. They must be good. And trustworthy. And capable. They did something right to be up there."

When you optimize your Web site with geographic qualifiers it becomes laughably easy, after a few months of paying an SEO person, to be first in your niche (complete piano service, or rentals, or sales) in your area. And how many other piano people in your area are going to do this? The answer is none. There will be an initial setup fee of between 500 and 1000 dollars, then a monthly, ongoing support fee of somewhere between 50 and 250 dollars, depending on the size of your market.

By the time my optimization started working, the first two clients I got straight from the Web site—a Steinway L needing action work, and a Mason & Hamlin BB and a Bluthner concert grand in the same house that each needed two full days of service—paid for the initial setup fee and one year of monthly fees (my fees were and are higher because I'm optimizing nationally rather than locally).

My real gross dollar return on the money it cost me to build the site and optimize it so far has been a little over eight dollars returned for each dollar spent. I will take that return on investment all day, every day. This includes two complete Steinway restorations and the sale of a Steinway B and a Bosendorfer 225, all clients that came straight from the Internet, all local Los Angeles people. They never would have known I existed without the Internet, and without me applying search engine optimization to my site.

Again, that is wildly effective marketing. The difficult part is actually making the site, and making it fun and creative and rich with personality and information. Once you've done that, and found an SEO person or company to work with, you have constructed what amounts to a gold mine in your home town. After a while YOU will get "all the calls," and be able to fire them, pass them on, or make money with them. YOU will gradually be seen as "the good piano tuner" or one of the elite—again, assuming you have the skills and character to back it up.

I wish you the best of luck in your journey to discover your brand, and then make your brand known and trusted in your community. Having a good, deep, rich Web site that comes up on the first page of a search engine is another extremely powerful tool to secure your income, your security, and your standing in your community and among your peers. If you need my help, or guidance, or just need to talk about this new challenge, please feel free to contact me through my Web site.

*Always aim for the high end.* —Willis Snyder